satisfaction and finds a pleasant test of his abilities in setting words to refrains whose meaning is unknown and in stimulating laughter or pleasant and amusing ideas in his audience, either by vaunting the joys of love and the plastic perfections of the human body, or by recalling [217] useful or pleasant memories, or by honoring justice and goodness. The morals of these folk, who are indolent because they are content with very little and are happy and healthy, and to whom all our subtleties are unknown, permit the greatest license in songs and improvisations and the greatest realism and crudity in the expression of thoughts.

In spite of this, there is not the least unhealthy intention in either the poet or his audience. As we have seen above in connection with burials, children of both sexes attend all these festivities accompanied by their parents. They all take pleasure in the same refrains and laugh at the same funny sayings, not because they are vicious but because they are pure pagans for whom enjoyment and pleasure are like gods. The songs are animated by graceful gestures, and together with the music form a whole which is poetic according to their particular esthetic canons and which is simply a manifestation of art and not an indication of loose morals.

Theater. The Laotians also have a dramatic repertory consisting of longwinded plays, epics, religious and warlike stories, romantic tales, ancient legends, etc. These poems are played by several actors, with an orchestra and supernumeraries, and require many very ornate costumes which have not varied in form since the earliest times. Usually, however, the costumes are mere tinsel.

Like the Cambodian and Siamese theater from which it comes, the Laotian theater interprets age-old works taken from the Védas, the Ramayana or the Mahabharata. To this repertory are added purely Kmer plays and various adaptations of Burmese origin which are performed in the classical costumes and in which a strong tinge of comedy and modernism and a bit of satire are mingled with the ancient traditions.

Women are excluded from the theater, and the female roles are played by young men. As in the case of songs and improvisations, dramatic knowledge, the repertory of plays and the art of acting are handed down from father to son. The actors are called Lakhone and plays are called Kam-Kong-Lakhone or Kam-Kong [218] Fone-Lakhone if they include dances or ballets. Finally, one last dramatic genre

7: Thompson--373 J-4 (no date) 1937 Laotians
116, 193, 536, 538

"The Laotian tongue is very simple. It is mainly monosyllabic: the article is never used, and substantives are not declined. Profane literature includes historical works, chiefly the annals of Luang-Prabang as well as its codes of law, novels, and songs. There is a large sacred literature, a very small part of which has been translated from Pali into the vernacular. Their drama is akin to the Khmers' in length, costuming, and music. The themes are epic, religious, or bellicose history, love stories and legends, mostly taken from the Vedas, the Ramayana, and Mahabharata. Many Khmer and even Burmese plays, with a modern satirical tone, lend a cosmopolitan character to the Laotian repertoire. A kind of marionette theatre, analogous to the Javanese, exists as well."

536 of Burmese origin is called I-Ke or Lakhone-I-Ke.

There are also animated Shadow theaters in Laos, like the Chinese or Javanese shadow theaters. The figurines in them are quite large, completely articulated and strikingly lifelike in all their attitudes and in their gestures, which correspond perfectly to the words of their manipulators. Some of these shadow figures are so well articulated that they scrupulously reproduce the movements of the mouth, nose, eyes, etc. Finally, so that they need envy no one, the Laotians also have a puppet theater [Guignol] like our French puppet theater of Lyons. The puppets represent local types and costumes, banter certain social classes with their sarcasm and ridicule certain personages who lend themselves easily to criticism. The artists who make these little wooden knaves function have as much verve, malice and wit as their colleagues in Europe, and although their wit is usually somewhat coarse it is perfectly adapted to the milieu. The puppets enjoy great public favor, and so their performances, which last far into the night, are among those most enjoyed by an audience which is always numerous and attentive. Old men, adults and children come and stay for hours at a time, gasping and lifting their faces towards the opening out of which the puppets' heads and shoulders protrude. The witty sayings, jokes of all kinds and even the gestures of these puppets often shake the whole audience with a fit of uncontrollable laughter.

535 462 857 Dancing. The dance (fone in Laotian) finds little favor with the Laotians. Scarcely any but men engage in this pastime, and they dance a kind of Pyrrhic during the feast of rockets and a Phallic at the time of the pirogue regattas. During festivals singers and songstresses often mix dancing with their songs, but it is limited to a few rhythmic gestures of the hands and upper part of the body, without any movement of the feet.

There are no professional women dancers in Laos as there are in Siam or Cambodia. I know of only one ballet corps, [219] that of Luang-Prabang, which is composed exclusively of children and very young people. This group, which is nicely costumed, is developing under the direction of one master and several supervisors. It executes figures and a few steps which are always very graceful, while carrying multicolored lanterns in the shape of balloons or flowers. The dances are accompanied by songs and form a most harmonious and pleasant ensemble.

Kha

586 684 and to the family of his accomplice. In a case of flagrante delicto, however, he has the right to kill the guilty parties.

[462] Kha women, when married, are renowned for their austerity, and their conduct is usually exemplary. Moreover, they are very soon disfigured by precocious and repeated childbearing, as well as by the difficult work which they do, and after two or three years of marriage the poor women are no longer tempting to anyone.

764 Deaths. Cremation is not practiced by the Khas. They bury their dead in as summary a fashion as the Lus, and for a few days bring food to the freshly filled grave. Then the latter is abandoned.

When a chief or a rich man is to be buried, the body is placed in a coffin hewn from a tree trunk.

181 Character. Like all oppressed peoples, the Khas are reserved and timid. They are afraid of innovations and new faces. But in intimate gatherings with their own people they are just as merry and love music, dances, celebrations and festivals just as much as the other peoples of Laos.

535 536 Music and dancing. They know certain dances imitated from the Lus, pantomimes (1) which resemble the I-Ke of the Burmese.

(1) They also have the habit of performing scenes in pantomime, rather like extremely primitive ballets. We shall describe one such scene:

"A group of girls, guarded by two respectable men, are pursuing the pleasures of dancing. A rogue comes up and tries to make off with one of the girls. After a few unsuccessful attempts he succeeds in eluding the guards' vigilance, jumps forward to seize the girl on whom he has designs, and clasps her in his arms. But his happiness is too much for him and he falls senseless at the feet of the girl he wanted to abduct." (Le Laos français.) - [Lieutenant-colonel Tournier (Superior Resident in Laos), "Notice sur le Laos français," in Revue Indochinoise, Hanoi, 1900.]

and [255] singsong legends in which the r's and k's roll out in terrible fashion. They also have songs which they accompany on flutes, clarinets and single-stringed violins. 533 Some tribes have xylophones, these being instruments composed of bamboo tubes of [Illustration here] different thickness and length, each of which produces a tone varying with its size. It will be seen that by striking with a [256] stick of wood on these tubes, a combination of more or less harmonious sounds will

a thin wooden plate for the So O, or a simple cylinder of may dou 534
whose extremity has a stretched boa skin for the So I.

The So Bang is nothing but a bamboo tube in a crude handle. Its register is small, and it is never used in an orchestra.

In all these violins, the bow is made of animal hair and passes between the strings.

Among the percussion instruments, the Nang Nat or Rang Nat is the most popular. It is a real xylophone and is made of wooden plates of different thicknesses suspended above a boat-shaped concave piece of wood which forms the sounding box.

The Khong Vong consists of sixteen bronze cymbals arranged on a semicircular frame made of rattan. In order to play these two instruments the musician uses two mallets whose head is made of elephant skin for the Khong Vong with which he strikes the keys by sliding them over the latter.

The Laotian orchestra has two forms: 1st) the Seb Noi or Ma Ho Ry consisting of several So, a varying number of khene, a Rang Nat, a Khong Vong and tambourines. The role of the Seb Noi is to accompany in an undertone a chorus or a solo; 2nd) the Seb Gnai (yai) is made up of the same instruments as the Seb Noi. Along with the so and the khene it also includes some large drums and a sort of clarinet or pi. This orchestra never accompanies singing. Its place is in the royal retinue or in a religious procession. Occasionally it is used in war dances of an episode taken from the Ramayana.

The performers always play from memory. Musicians are educated purely by ear and by intelligence.

[88] Laotian music uses only the octave with seven tones corres- 533
ponding to the scale of a khene. There are a variety of tunes composed by individual musicians whose names are lost. At the present day the most popular is the Lam Vong.

The Theatre

With more ballet and pantomime than real theatre, the Laotian 536
theatre, just as in Cambodia, is an intimate and complicated assembly of literature and music with orchestra and chorus, mimed scenes, dance and dialogue. The subjects of the classical theatre played at court are drawn from the Ramayana or other equally popular local works. The drama is presented with gestures learned and regulated beforehand, since each of the plastic phrases expressed by the actor or actress has necessarily a length determined by that of the musical phrase played by the orchestra or sung by the chorus.

536 There is no scenery. The costumes and headdresses vary according to the characters represented. The masks of colored lacquer worn by the actors, their accessories (weapons, scarves, etc.) being traditional and invariable enable the fictitious characters on the stage to be identified.

/178 The theatre of animated shadows, similar to the shadow theatre
101/ of China and Java, tends to disappear little by little.

Laotian Decoration.

Laotian decoration is characterized by a somewhat mannered
531 elegance which can be noticed in the motifs of the pagoda doors and
178 windows. The Laotian artisan is, however, endowed with an extremely well developed artistic sense, but the present day demands do not enable him any longer to live by his handiwork, and the importation of manufactured articles tends to make the artist disappear. /89/ He can only survive by royal patronage. The royal palace for this reason shelters sculptors on wood and ivory as well as goldsmiths, but
/644/ their produce is not sold and the tourist will hardly be able to bring back with him typical Laotian objects.

However, the weaving of silk materials of divers shades, often laminated with gold or silver, is still done on a sufficient scale to
/236/ satisfy the passing tourist.

The Sin

This is a skirt reaching from the hips to the ankles. It is of a
291 rather somber color with a design of vertical stripes very close together and not very evident. This skirt is decorated on its lower edge with a flat trimming of two or three rows of gold or silver braid. At the top of the skirt a belt of red cloth, more or less embroidered, relieves the rather dark tone. This garment is a regular cylinder having the same width on its entire length. When the woman emerges from her bath she lifts her skirt, gathered into the shape of a crown, above her head and lets it slide down the length of her body. She fixes it without hooks or fasteners to her belt by means of a turned in pleat tied in front leaving most of her belly exposed. A bright colored scarf of cotton or silk thrown over one shoulder and completely covering the breasts completes the costume. The most beautiful scarves come from Samneua, Luang Prabang and Khong. The jewelry most frequently seen consists of
301 silver bracelets, necklaces and buttons, rings, long crossed over chains /chaînes-sautoirs/, flat clasps, and belts usually of silver but sometimes of gold.

/Pages 90 to 135 not translated/ /136 blank/